

In the broad context of community, Audre Lorde has functioned as a role model and an inspiration. She presented her words and the very living of her life with such integrity and craft that all she has created has become worthy of emulation. In trying to relate the significance of Audre's life, several words come to mind: power, courage, integrity, presence, craft and love.

"Audre seemed to me to be power incarnate. There was terrific power in her physical presence and a resonance in her voice that carried the weight of her words. At Oberlin College in 1985, she told her audience, 'Each one of us has some power that can be used, but power is relative; unless we claim it and use it, it will be used against us.' Lorde went on to question the students, 'Now are you using all of who you are in the service of your beliefs?'"

"Audre Lorde identified herself as 'Black, Woman, Mother, Lesbian, Warrior, Poet.' She applied all of who she was to the examination of many important themes of our time. She brought her own truths and clarity to such issues as horizontal hostility among feminists, lesbian S/M, black male violence against black women, interracial relationships, racism, incest, U.S. imperialism, the politics of cancer and more.

"The ways in which she approached these themes was always insightful and never dull. Her poetry is especially full with well-chosen, evocative phrases.

"Lorde remarked to the students at Oberlin that 'all poems are in some way love poems.' This is perhaps because the poet must open herself up to her theme, and then share what she finds with her readers. Surely Audre Lorde has given greatly of herself and loved her readers well.

"A future without new insights from Audre Lorde is a prospect over which we must grieve. Mixed in with those tears of grief, however, are also those of gratitude and joy—gratitude over the existence and visibility of an honored foremother, and joy that one woman's well-articulated truth could touch the hearts of so many. As Lorde herself wrote, 'I am a Black woman stripped down and praying; my whole life has been an altar worth its ending.'"

Diana A. Cohen
local lesbian feminist poet

"We must recognize and nurture the creative parts of each other without always understanding what will be created."

Audre Lorde, *"Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger,"*
Sister Outsider,
The Crossing Press, 1984.

"She brought out the experience of feeling for me by showing that we needed to feel everything to truly experience being a woman, being a Black woman. We need to feel every aspect of our lives. It is through her teaching that I understand that she is not dead to me—she is an ancestor now."

A student
of Audre Lorde's at Hunter College, N.Y.

Conclusion

Passing men in the street who are dead becomes a common occurrence but loving one of them is no solution.

I believe in love as I believe in our children but I was born Black and without illusions and my vision which differs from yours is clear although sometimes restricted.

I have watched you at midnight moving through casual sleep wishing I could afford the non-desperate dreams that stir you to wither and fade into partial solutions. Your nights are wintery long and very young full of symbols of purity and forgiveness and a meek Jesus that rides through your cities on a barren ass whose braying does not include a future tense.

But I wear my nights as I wear my life and my dying absolute and unforgiven nuggets of compromise and decision fossilized by fierce midsummer sun and when I dream I move through a Black land where the future glows eternal and green but where the symbols for now are bloody and unrelenting rooms where confused children with wooden stumps for fingers play at war who cannot pick up their marbles and run away home whenever nightmare threatens.

Audre Lorde
From a Land Where Other People Live,
Broadside Press, 1973.

"I wish to raise a Black man who will not be destroyed by, nor settle for, those corruptions called power by the white fathers who mean his destruction as surely as they mean mine. I wish to raise a Black man who will recognize that the legitimate objects of his hostility are not women, but the particulars of a structure that programs him to fear and despise women as well as his own Black self.

"For me, this task begins with teaching my son that I do not exist to do his feeling for him."

Audre Lorde, *"Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response,"* Sister Outsider,
The Crossing Press, 1984.

"There is no question that Audre Lorde was putting the issue of cancer, especially breast cancer, squarely in the political arena, where it belongs, long before anyone else. We've lost somebody really important with her passing, because she was so clear about what she was."

Judy Brady
cancer survivor and cancer activist,
editor of 1 in 3: Women With
Cancer Confront An Epidemic

"Audre worked with so much integrity, that had to be her greatest contribution. Most people don't realize what a high price that level of integrity exacts.

"One thing that the lesbian and gay community often doesn't realize about Audre is the high skill-level she had as a writer. People embrace her because of the message in her words, and it's important that people know how technically skilled and developed she was as a writer.

"She would have received a lot more recognition as a writer if she hadn't been out as a lesbian.

"The integrity with which she worked was a great act of courage. She didn't stop at having a brilliant writing career...she politicized it. In her work, in her life, she wasn't willing to let people get away with oppression, racism. If you look at her poems, she's very political. She was never silent about oppression."

Barbara Smith
co-founder of Kitchen Table:
Women of Color Press

"When we turn from anger we turn from insight, saying we will accept only the designs already known; dead and safely familiar."

Audre Lorde, *"The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,"*
Sister Outsider,
The Crossing Press, 1984.

"Audre affected my life by being what I call a bright light. There are people in your life who help you push the edges of yourself to discover new things about yourself. Audre was one of those people to me. I always enjoyed any time I had with her. We ate each other's brains up. She always made me think about what I was doing, what I said and my responsibility for things, just by our dialogue. We hadn't talked a lot in the last few years, but she was a support for me in her writing and I admired her. She was courageous and gifted. I will miss her. I will miss knowing that she is in the world, but I do believe that bright light still shines and that she handed it to lots of people in little sparks, and it is up to us to make them glow and grow."

Kathleen Saadat
longtime women's- and civil-rights activist

"Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time and the arena and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle wherever we are standing. It does not matter too much if it is in the radiation lab or a doctor's office or the telephone company, the streets, the welfare department or the classroom. The real blessing is to be able to use whoever I am wherever I am, in concert with as many others as possible, or alone if needs be."

Audre Lorde, *"A Burst of Light: Living With Cancer,"*
Firebrand Books, 1988.

"Anger is useful to help clarify our differences, but in the long run, strength that is bred by anger alone is a blind force which cannot create the future. It can only demolish the past."

Audre Lorde, *"Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger,"*
Sister Outsider,
The Crossing Press, 1984.

"Audre Lorde is a voice of eloquent courage and unflinching honesty. She grew up speaking with the voice of a poet—passionate, always, about telling her truth and sharing her triumphs and pain with her loved ones, her community and the world.

"She has never outgrown the passion as she has sung her songs of joy and anger, of desire and loss. She writes about love and suffering in vividly honest and penetrating language but with artful dramatic dexterity.

"There is no cant, no idle conjuring in Audre Lorde's work. She allows herself to be known fully. Her imagination is charged by a sharp sense of racial injustice and cruelty, of sexual prejudice. She cries out against it as the voice of indignant humanity.

"She is candid, even bold about the hard truth as she has witnessed and lived it. But she has not missed the sweetness either. She sings, too, of the love and sisterhood among women and of the tenderness that accompanies the tensions between parents and children and mothers and daughters.

"It has been said of Audre Lorde that she is like the black unicorn of which she writes: a magical and mysterious bearer of fantasy draped in truth and beauty.

"Audre Lorde is a poet of courage and pride, of hard-edged anger and of indomitable hope, for light and change."

Gov. Mario Cuomo
His statement when Audre Lorde was named New York State Poet on Nov. 12, 1991.